CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.788
12 March 1998

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 12 March 1998, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Hofer (Switzerland)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 788th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me, first of all, to extend a cordial welcome on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Mr. Camilo Reyes Rodríguez, who will be our first speaker today. I am sure that his statement will be followed with the greatest interest. Aside from the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, I have on my list of speakers the representative of China.

I would also like, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to extend a cordial welcome to the representatives of non-governmental organizations who are present in the public gallery today. As you know, International Women's Day was celebrated on 8 March, and to mark that event, in accordance with established practice, the Women for Peace Working Group of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women will address a message to the Conference. I am certain that the Conference will join me in expressing our best wishes to all the women present in the room tody and telling them how much we appreciate their constant commitment to peace and disarmament and their continued interest in our work.

I would now like to give the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, who will read their message to the Conference.

Mr. PETROVSKY (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): It gives me great pleasure to read out the statement to the Conference by the Women for Peace Working Group.

"Distinguished members of the Conference on Disarmament:

"In celebration of International Women's Day, 1998, women from different countries are assembled in Geneva to participate in a seminar on the 'The right to peace', a dialogue addressing issues of human rights, security and disarmament. We see our gathering as a contribution to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document which belongs to our common heritage, with universal relevance and validity to all societies, nations, and to all people.

"The respect for and promotion of civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development are closely linked to the security of individuals and countries. Armed and other types of conflicts, terrorism and hostage-taking still persist in many parts of the world. Aggression, foreign occupation, ethnic and other types of conflicts are an ongoing reality affecting women and men in nearly every region. The level of global military spending remains an unacceptable diversion of the world's resources which must be better

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allocated to facilitate peace and security, as stated in the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. Because disarmament is of particular importance in this process, the CD, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is an essential organ in this work for peace and security.

"We welcome the announcement by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his reform plan to give a higher profile to disarmament within the United Nations system. We applaud the conclusion of the Ottawa treaty banning the development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines and await its entry into force. This, however, is not enough. We are here today to urge the members of the Conference on Disarmament to embrace the fundamental right to peace by strengthening the role of the CD in fostering international peace and security. We call on you, members of the Conference on Disarmament, to do your utmost in 1998 to substantively address the urgent issue of nuclear disarmament.

"This year, Geneva will host the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference in 2000. In 1995, when the parties to this Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons agreed to extend this agreement for an indefinite period of time, we trusted the commitment undertaken by Governments to inaugurate a dynamic review process with a view to the fulfilment of all articles of the Treaty, in particular article VI concerning nuclear disarmament. While minimal progress has been registered in this field, we believe that it is in the Conference on Disarmament that steps must be taken to strive for nuclear disarmament. The global movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons is growing in momentum, finding friends in places that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago. Across the political spectrum citizens are calling for nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their treaty obligations.

"In 1998, we renew our call upon the CD to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to begin concrete negotiations on a 'nuclear weapons convention'. We welcome the different initiatives being taken to discuss the content of such a convention and support the Costa Rican proposal submitted to the General Assembly in document No. A/C.1/52/7.

"We women peace activists from many countries who have mobilized public opinion and lobbied to stop nuclear testing see with great concern that only 10 countries have ratified the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We urge all Governments which have not done so to ratify the CTBT immediately.

"We also emphasize the urgent need for the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on the 'prevention of an arms race in

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outer space'. The 'Outer Space' Treaty of 1967 is no longer sufficient. New technological developments are endangering the peaceful use of outer space and contribute to its militarization. We welcome the 1997 General Assembly resolution 52/37 on the 'Prevention of an arms race in outer space' and urge you to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee during this 1998 session.

"We cannot live in security while arms continue to pose a concrete threat to our right to peace, while the existence of anti-personnel landmines makes it impossible to live without fear of physical and mental harm, while biological and chemical weapons, nuclear weapons and waste, pose an ongoing threat to people's lives. Security can no longer be defined solely in military terms. Security needs to be understood in a broader way 'that encompasses a state of well-being in which an individual or group has the assurance of protection from physical and mental harm, freedom from fear and anxiety and is able to live life with dignity', as stated by the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Gender-based Persecution, 1997.

"We, members of women and peace organizations, who are working to strengthen awareness and action on disarmament issues, will constructively support a proactive move by the Conference on Disarmament to address the issues we have brought before you today. We would like to end by quoting General Assembly resolution 39/11 of 12 November 1984, on the right of peoples to peace, which states:

'... ensuring the exercise of the right of peoples to peace demands that the policies of States be directed towards the elimination of the threat of war, particularly nuclear war, the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations'".

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for reading the message from the community of non-governmental organizations on the occasion of International Women's Day. I understand that the group coordinators would like to take the floor. I first give the floor to the representative of Venezuela, Ambassador Rodríguez Cedeño, speaking on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ CEDEÑO (Venezuela) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me to say, on behalf of the Group of 21, how grateful we are to the women present, and especially for the statement that was made by the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, on the occasion of International Women's Day. On behalf of the Group of 21 I would like to congratulate the non-governmental organizations that are with us today, the women of the world, who gathered together in these organizations forming part of international civil society, are dedicating their efforts to

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the cause of peace and development, and in particular for their interest in the topics which form the subjects of the work of the Conference. Women in the world have certainly made a meaningful effort on the various issues of concern to the international community, not only with regard to disarmament and international peace and security, but with regard to all the activities of society. Their efforts have a profound impact on the progress of mankind, and therefore, on behalf of the Group of 21, I congratulate women on their International Day.

Mr. ULUÇEVIK (Turkey): Since this is my first statement in a formal plenary under your able presidency, I wish to begin by congratulating you, Sir, not only for your assumption of this prestigious post several weeks ago but, more than that, because you indeed deserve more than the customary words of congratulations for your unremitting efforts to break the deadlock which the Conference on Disarmament has fallen into, in starting its substantive work. With your energy and wisdom, along with your gift for diplomacy, you have proved to be a man of difficult times. Your outstanding performance also shows how justified we were in placing our unreserved trust in your person, an eminent diplomat of Switzerland.

I wish also to commend your predecessor, Ambassador Lars Norberg of Sweden, and thank him for his diligent and wise endeavours to bring about substantial progress in our work.

I consider myself privileged to make a statement on behalf of the Western Group on the occasion of International Women's Day. It is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Western Group, to the representatives of the women's international organizations who have joined the CD today to mark International Women's Day. We thank them for the interest and support they have given to our work. In particular, our thanks go to the Women for Peace Working Group of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women for the message of encouragement contained in the address read by our distinguished Secretary-General.

On behalf of the members of the Western Group and also on my own delegation's behalf, I would like to express to all the representatives of the women's international organizations, as well as to all women heads and members of delegations, secretariat staff and interpreters, our heartfelt congratulations on this occasion. We wish all the women of the world, whom we hold in high esteem, health and happiness in their own lives with the hope that they will be even more deeply involved in our work on disarmament and arms control so as to make a greater contribution to the safeguarding of international peace and security.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Turkey for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus, Ambassador Agurtsou, who will speak on behalf of the Eastern European Group.

Mr. AGURTSOU (Belarus): On behalf of the countries of the Eastern European Group, it is my pleasure to express our gratitude to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for delivering to us the message from the community of non-governmental organizations on the occasion of International Women's Day, celebrated last Sunday.

On behalf of the Eastern European Group, I would like to thank the distinguished NGOs for their interest in, and support of, our work, and assure them that we will try to do our best in order to fulfil their expectations.

Let me convey to the representatives of the women's international organizations, as well as all women heads and members of delegations, secretariat staff and interpreters, our warm and heartfelt congratulations on such an event.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): International Women's Day (8 March) has just passed and the Chinese delegation, as an independent party in the CD, would like to take this opportunity to extend our warm congratulations to all women. In particular, I would like to extend my congratulations and greetings to all female colleagues, observers and representatives of NGOs attending today's meeting and the female staff in the CD secretariat. Women throughout the world, in all walks of life, including the field of international security and disarmament, play an irreplaceable role. There is a Chinese saying that women hold up half the sky; in certain areas, they hold up more than half. The Chinese delegation wishes all the ladies good health, happiness at home and success in their work. We could wish them to play an even greater role in maintaining international peace and security, disarmament and arms control.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of China for his statement. I now invite the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Mr. Camilo Reyes Rodríguez, to make his statement.

Mr. REYES RODRIGUEZ (Colombia) (translated from Spanish): It is a source of great satisfaction for me to speak in the plenary on this special occasion when Switzerland is playing the dual role of being the host country and President of the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me, Mr. President, to thank you for the resolute efforts that you have been making in order to channel the work of the Conference along the path of productive work to benefit the whole of mankind, and to assure you of the full support of my delegation in your endeavours. I would also like to thank Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference, for the secretariat's constant and efficient support for our work.

While it is necessary to recognize that the positions of delegations to the Conference on Disarmament on the practical steps to be taken with regard to the items on its agenda are customarily diverse and sometimes antagonistic owing to the complexity of the subjects under discussion as well as the sensitivity of countries with regard to their security concerns, the

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Conference on Disarmament cannot shirk the responsibility it bears, to itself and to the international community, to move forward the necessary negotiations on the existing broad gamut of subjects related to disarmament. Among all these subjects, I shall only refer on this occasion to the following.

First of all, anti-personnel mines. When the international community was moved by the ravages caused by anti-personnel mines in the world, it was able to galvanize itself rapidly into action to eliminate them. Many Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations were mobilized to develop and foster the process that culminated in the adoption of the Ottawa Convention and its signing by more than 120 countries. Colombia, as a signatory State of the Ottawa Convention, is seeking to build on the success attained in the Ottawa Process to progress in securing the speedy ratification of this Convention and making it universal, pursuing the task of creating awareness of the urgent need to find a solution to the problems generated by the use, production, stockpiling and transfers of anti-personnel mines.

Solving these problems will require first of all coordinating humanitarian assistance to victims of mines, securing commitments for mine clearance in the affected countries and continuing to collect funds for those purposes. It will also be necessary to maintain the close ties and solidarity that were achieved in the Ottawa Process between the interested States, "civil society" and the international agencies involved. The Ottawa Convention is now not just a point of reference but also the point of departure for the development of activities leading to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines. Once the Convention enters into effect, it will be understood that its provisions will become rules of international law and that all national, regional or international efforts will be judged in terms of their contribution to the objectives of this Convention.

There are various avenues running parallel to the Ottawa Convention that could be used in order to make it universal. First of all, the route involving the Conference on Disarmament, which would bring into a possible negotiating process a number of States that are not now in the Convention, some of which have already openly expressed their interest. Second, regional initiatives could be extremely useful to prompt new accessions to the Ottawa Convention, particularly on the part of States that have cited regional situations or tensions as grounds for not signing it. Third, accession to Protocol II of the 1980 Convention on Certain Inhumane Conventional Weapons, which, while it does not at present ban anti-personnel mines, could be amended in the future to cover the areas that have already been agreed to in the Ottawa Convention.

With regard to the possibility of negotiating a legal framework for anti-personnel mines in the Conference on Disarmament, it is necessary to ensure that the treatment of this subject will not jeopardize the rules already laid down in the Ottawa Convention, and in particular to prevent the lodging of reservations in respect of the ban on these mines which are based on military reasons and ignore humanitarian considerations. It is clear that in legal terms the Ottawa Convention went beyond Protocol II on anti-personnel

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mines to the 1980 Convention on Certain Inhumane Conventional Weapons. Nevertheless, accession to this Convention is of major importance, because of the fact that it legally binds the States parties to observe certain humanitarian norms with regard to the use of these mines pending their accession to the Ottawa Convention or any other similar regime.

Turning to small arms, the delegation of Colombia wishes in the first instance to indicate the major importance that it attaches to the subject of small arms. The illicit traffic in light arms and their widespread use are elements which make it increasingly costly and difficult to exercise the control that States must maintain on crimes which, like drug trafficking, endanger the most sacred values of society. In the United Nations and other multilateral forums notable progress has been made with the aim of curbing and preventing the circulation of small arms and illicit traffic in them. The efforts made by the Organization of American States to adopt the Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, as well as the agreements reached among the countries of the European Union designed to contribute to the attainment of these ends, offer a global picture that is more encouraging than the one that existed in 1988 when, on the initiative of Colombia, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 43/75 I, the first adopted by the Organization on the subject of the transfer of and illicit traffic in these weapons.

As a result of the process that was started then, the Member States of the United Nations now have some guidelines adopted by the Disarmament Commission and the recommendations that are contained in the report of the Secretary-General on small arms that was drawn up by a Panel of Governmental Experts, which furnish clear guidance on how to prevent the destabilizing circulation of these weapons and the illicit traffic in them. The recommendations of the Secretary-General, to which Colombia attaches the greatest importance, include the holding of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects. This conference, besides coordinating international efforts to combat this scourge, would make it possible to create awareness in world public opinion of the need to address the subject of weapons which, though small, play a disproportionate role in the violence that afflicts many countries and regions, becoming instruments that destabilize societies and Governments, encourage criminal activities and provide protection for terrorism, drug trafficking, common crime and organized crime, mercenary activities and the violation of human rights. Because fundamental issues are at stake that involve the peaceful existence and well-being of many people and their potential to live in peace, we believe that the subject of small arms must continue to be dealt with in multilateral forums that are open to all States, without preventing the Conference on Disarmament, as the negotiating body par excellence, from having a clear mandate to negotiate an international code of conduct for the control of small arms at the global level, through a mechanism that is open to the participation of all States.

The importance of preventing the militarization of outer space was reflected in the Final Document of the first special session which the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in 1978, a document

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which called for the holding of negotiations on this topic. As all those here will recall, the Conference on Disarmament has had this item on its agenda since 1982, and only in 1985 was it able to establish an ad hoc committee with a mandate to deal with the questions pertaining to this subject, through substantive and general consideration. In the various phases in which the Ad Hoc Committee met little progress was made, despite the initiatives submitted by member States, the reports of the Secretary-General on the subject, changes in the international political situation and the efforts that have been made to intensify peaceful cooperation in outer space. Nevertheless, in the view of the delegation of Colombia, the wealth of documentation prepared by this Committee since its establishment would furnish a basis for the speedy development of a legally binding, universal, broad and effectively verifiable regime that will prohibit the arms race in outer space.

The legal regime applicable to outer space is not in itself sufficient to guarantee the prevention of an arms race in outer space. An effective regime established to this end would have to comprise, in addition to the establishment of rules of conduct to govern operations in space and a verification protocol, confidence-building measures designed to improve the transparency of space operations and information concerning satellites in orbit. This regime would be an important step forward in the prevention of an arms race in outer space and could be backed up by an international space monitoring system to determine, among other important issues, that relating to detailed notifications concerning nuclear-propelled space objects. Therefore the delegation of Colombia is firmly convinced of the need to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on the subject during this session.

Now I would like to turn to nuclear disarmament. As the nuclear issue moves from the sphere of political rhetoric to that of practical and progressive discussion of viable methods that could lead to a nuclear-weapon-free world, cooperative solutions to security problems and respect for international laws, instead of confrontation, can be glimpsed as a goal to be pursued in a process of nuclear disarmament. The success of a nuclear disarmament process based on the greatest of global imperatives - the need to prevent a nuclear war, with all that implies for the survival of mankind - will depend on the efforts made by the international community, reflected in the resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, in the negotiating function of the Conference on Disarmament, in the deliberative work of the Disarmament Commission, in the recommendations of various international expert commissions, such as the Canberra Commission, and in achievements such as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which lays down legal authority on the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons.

If nuclear disarmament is perceived as an act of political will which must commit the nuclear-weapon States to dismantle their capability to produce and use nuclear weapons and conclude safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency on nuclear material under their jurisdiction, it is evident that this will require a resolute decision on the part of the highest authorities of those States, as well as the States that maintain nuclear facilities without the benefits of safeguards. Nevertheless,

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the process of nuclear disarmament also calls for resolute leadership on the part of the United Nations and a radical change in the views of rulers and ruled in the countries that have nuclear weapons with regard to the way they perceive the function of these weapons and the use of military force. The experience of the Ottawa Process, which led to the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, encourages the aspiration of many people to bring about nuclear disarmament by means of various mechanisms of awareness creation and social pressure, fostered from the grass roots of civil society, to promote trends that will lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons, such as: domestic pressure to reduce economic imbalances created by the arms build-up; cuts in resources allocated to defence, and particularly to military nuclear research; most importantly, strengthening of the indivisible concept of global security, which will make it possible to downgrade the strategic significance of nuclear weapons, including their role in the doctrine of deterrence. Colombia has been supporting all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly for many years, and has been asking the Conference on Disarmament to establish an ad hoc committee to deal with the subject of nuclear disarmament. We consider that the credibility and the worth of the Conference now lies in the work to be carried out by this Committee, which should be given a negotiating mandate in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament.

Now I would like to turn to transparency in armaments. From an analysis of the results of the first years of operation of the United Nations arms register, it is clear that in practice the fact of giving information on transfers of seven categories of conventional weapons does not mean that the information that is published contributes significantly to reducing tensions among States, or that States are going to scale down or give up a lucrative business. First and foremost, States continue buying and selling weapons either for commercial reasons or by invoking the right to security and defence. The arms Register, which is currently limited to giving information on transfers of weapons most of which are not used in current conflicts, could contribute to confidence among States and bring about genuine "transparency" insofar as it offered a clear picture of the weapons that are produced and exist in the world, as well as those that are involved in commercial exchanges. The Register, once broadened, could also provide an analytical basis for moving on to a more ambitious phase, consisting of the negotiation of an international code of conduct relating to the transfer, production and stockpiling of such weapons.

Although the language of resolution 46/36 L, from which the Register originated, does not reflect sufficiently clearly what should be genuine transparency in the field of weapons, it is true that this resolution, in its operative part, created the commitment for broadening the Register to cover such important aspects as military holdings, procurement through national production and the inclusion of further categories of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction. However, the Group of Experts entrusted with broadening the Register to cover the elements referred to above did not manage to achieve consensus on this matter. Bearing in mind that the arms trade is the final phase in the armaments cycle, which begins with the research and development process and then passes to the production phase, policies targeted

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only on the final phase of the armaments cycle - trade - will always be incomplete and ineffective if such controls or restrictions do not apply to the entire cycle. Therefore, if the objective is to reduce the risk of armed conflicts by preventing the excessive accumulation of weapons, it is necessary to make progress with broader measures that will enable us to monitor research and development for military purposes, restrict weapons production, monitor the transfer of weapons technology, facilitate conversion and any other factor that could affect the cycle referred to. If the Conference on Disarmament does not manage to negotiate an international code of conduct relating to conventional weapons, the trade in these weapons will continue to be governed by the militaristic orientation and the commercial attitudes of the supplier countries, and by the militarism and behaviour of Governments and other players in the importing countries. The coexistence of these two trends and the contradiction between the official rhetoric of Governments and their actual behaviour reveal the insidious nature of this phenomenon and the difficulty of predicting future trends in arms transfers.

To conclude, I wish to appeal to the member States of the Conference on Disarmament to give their resolute support to the holding of the fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Both from the national perspective as well as in its capacity as President of the Non-Aligned Movement, Colombia has insisted that this session should be held as soon as possible. This special session would be the first to be held since the end of the cold war, and as such would have to address the most important aspects of the changes in the international situation and their relationship to global peace and security and the course which disarmament processes will follow in the next century.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia for his important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of China, Ambassador Li.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, as this is the first time I deliver a formal statement in the CD plenary as the newly appointed Chinese Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs, please allow me at the outset, in the name of the Chinese delegation and on my own behalf, to express my sincere congratulations to you, the distinguished representative of the host country, on assuming the important responsibility of the CD presidency. In the past weeks you have made invaluable input to the work of the CD, bringing to bear your outstanding wisdom and skills as well as your patience. You have devoted all your energies to the work of the CD and won appreciation and respect from all your colleagues.

May I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, the distinguished Ambassador of Sweden, Ambassador Norberg? Under his able leadership the CD got off to a good start at the current session by swiftly adopting the agenda. Ambassador Norberg also conducted constructive consultations on those agenda items which are of interest to all parties. His hard work facilitated the early establishment of working mechanisms in the CD. I would also like to thank most sincerely all

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my colleagues for the warm welcome they accorded to me on my assumption of my present post. I am delighted to be able to work with all of you and contribute my share to this important multilateral negotiating forum for arms control and disarmament which directly affects world peace and security. My appreciation also goes to Mr. Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the CD, to Mr. Bensmail, the Deputy Secretary-General, and to all the staff of the secretariat as well as to the interpreters and translators for their hard work and excellent service.

The present international situation is still undergoing profound changes characterized by a growing trend towards multipolarization and a widespread aspiration for peace and development. Against such a backdrop, fresh progress has been made in the last year in international arms control and disarmament. The Chemical Weapons Convention has entered into force and is now at the stage of implementation. The PrepCom for the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has commenced its work. Intensified negotiations on strengthening the effectiveness of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) are also under way. IAEA has adopted a protocol to enhance the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of its safeguards system. The United States and Russia have reached understanding on further steps in nuclear disarmament. The area covered by nuclear-weapon-free zones has extended greatly throughout the world.

At the same time, however, one should not lose sight of the daunting challenges and the arduous tasks that remain in disarmament and security. Despite the fact that the cold war has receded into history, we are still haunted by the spectre of the cold war mentality as evidenced by the expansion of military blocs, the strengthening of military alliances, the retention and even extension of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, and research, development and proliferation of strategic defence systems. Moreover, hegemonism and power politics, seeking to interfere in others' internal affairs and infringe on others' sovereignty, still persist. Such phenomena run counter to the trend of the times and as such are detrimental to international peace and security, and are hampering progress in the field of disarmament.

China has always pursued an independent foreign policy of peace; it is fully committed to world peace and security and attributes overriding importance to its economic development. China has never taken part in the arms race, nor has it stationed a single soldier or weapons system on foreign soil. It does not ally itself with any big Power or power bloc, nor does it seek to form a bloc of its own. History bears witness to China as a force for continued regional and global peace, security and stability. China has all along advocated genuine disarmament. It stands for the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, a prohibition on the development of outer space weapons and a reasonable reduction of conventional weapons. Last September, President Jiang Zemin announced that following on from the reduction of 1 million troops in the 1980s, China would cut its armed forces by a further 500,000 in the next three years. This is another significant and concrete disarmament move that the Chinese Government has taken unilaterally.

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Over the years the CD and its predecessors have made significant contributions to the conclusion of a series of multilateral arms control and disarmament treaties, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof, the BWC and the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques. With the above achievements, the CD and the Council Chamber in the Palais des Nations have captured the international spotlight. From the late 1980s to 1996, through intensive negotiations, the CD went on to conclude two more important treaties, the CWC and the CTBT. The CD can rightly take pride in its achievements; at the same time, the international community now has even greater expectations of the CD's ability to break new ground. However, the CD has for more than a year been unable to reach a consensus on its next objective for arms control and disarmament. As a result the initial enthusiasm and high expectations have begun to give way to disappointment and even criticism. Some say that the CD has plunged into a deepening crisis and now stands at a crossroads. There have even been calls to make a fresh start outside the CD, looking for a short cut in negotiating new multilateral arms control and disarmament treaties.

China believes that the CD, the sole multilateral negotiating forum for arms control and disarmament, retains its irreplaceable status and role. The international community needs the CD, and any attempt to weaken or replace it is hardly conducive to progress in disarmament or to world peace and security. The CD encompasses all militarily significant countries, and therefore only treaties concluded within this framework can enjoy truly wide representation and universality. Though the CD is the most authoritative multilateral arms control negotiating body, it should not be expected to conclude a new treaty every two or three years. Progress follows its own logic. Like a tide, it has its highs and lows. The conclusion of a treaty is only the final stage of a long process of endeavours, whereas prior explorations and preparations are also part and parcel of such a process.

CD members are currently exploring the next arms control and disarmament agreement or treaty to be negotiated. It is only natural that in such a process there are different views and ideas. This calls for an adequate exchange of views and a spirit of seeking common ground while reserving one's position. Consensus can be reached in a gradual manner and on a realistic basis. If agreement cannot be achieved for the time being, further consultations and dialogues can be pursued. In the end success will be within our reach. As the Chinese saying goes: "When a melon is ripe it falls off its stem; where water flows, a channel is formed." This of course does not mean that those issues vital to world peace and security should remain unresolved indefinitely. We should redouble our efforts, seize the day, seize the hour.

I would now like to state the views and comments of the Chinese delegation on some agenda items of the CD. "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament" is the first agenda item of the CD. It is also an issue to which all countries attach great importance. China has always

(Mr. Li, China)

stood for the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. China opposes the nuclear arms race and the policy of nuclear deterrence. Since the very first day when it came into possession of nuclear weapons, China has undertaken not to be the first to use them at any time under any circumstances. China has also made a unilateral, unconditional commitment not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States or nuclear-weapon-free zones. China has all along supported the efforts of non-nuclear-weapon States to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones on a voluntary basis. Therefore China's nuclear weapons do not constitute a threat to any country. China has always exercised extreme self-restraint on the development of nuclear weapons. It participated actively in the CTBT negotiations, signed the treaty, and supports the commencement of negotiations in the CD on a convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. At present the countries possessing the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenals should continue to fulfil their special responsibilities and obligations for nuclear disarmament. They should make further drastic reductions in their nuclear arsenals, abandon the strategy of nuclear deterrence, stop research on and the development of outer space weapons and refrain from the development, deployment and proliferation of missile defence systems which undermine global strategic security and stability. This would enable all the nuclear-weapon States to participate in a process of nuclear disarmament negotiations in the future.

Some members of the CD have already put forward a series of proposals on the establishment of a working mechanism for nuclear disarmament. The aspiration of the international community for nuclear disarmament and a nuclear-weapon-free world merits support and understanding. The Chinese delegation hopes that, on the basis of a full exchange of views, a commonly acceptable formula can be found to address and discuss nuclear disarmament in the CD, and we will support such endeavours.

Turning to the cut-off convention, China maintains that the conclusion of a convention on the prohibition of fissile material for nuclear weapons will be conducive to the prevention of nuclear proliferation and to the promotion of nuclear disarmament, a shared responsibility of every member of the international community. We support the commencement of negotiations on the cut-off convention in the CD on the basis of the mandate contained in the Shannon report, on which consensus was reached after full consultations, with a view to concluding a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as requested by United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/75 L. The future convention should be fair, reasonable and universal.

Outer space belongs to the whole of mankind and should be used solely for peaceful purposes for the benefit of humanity. All countries, especially those with advanced space capabilities, should refrain from the development of outer space weapons. They should take concrete actions to prevent an arms race in outer space. It is the shared view of the international community that the existing international legal instruments related to outer space are far from adequate for the effective prevention of an arms race in outer space.

(Mr. Li, China)

China, like other countries, is concerned about some activities involving the development and testing of components of outer space weapons or weapons systems in recent years. These activities are designed to use outer space for consolidating and strengthening military superiority on the ground and, as such, they run counter to the fundamental principle of the peaceful use of outer space. They undermine regional and global strategic balances, jeopardize peace, security and stability, and harbour the potential danger of turning outer space eventually into a battlefield. In view of the above, the prevention of an arms race in outer space has become an urgent issue. As the distinguished Ambassador of Sri Lanka rightly pointed out in the plenary session on 26 February, if we do not negotiate on the prevention of an arms race in outer space now, we will probably be compelled to negotiate on disarmament in outer space and prevention of the proliferation of outer space weapons in the near future.

The Chinese delegation maintains that the CD should re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. We also support the appointment of a special coordinator as a first step to organize discussions and consultations on issues related to outer space, with a view to re-establishing the Ad Hoc Committee to conduct negotiations on the prohibition of an arms race in outer space. My delegation will take an active part in the relevant deliberations and will expound the Chinese position fully on this issue.

The new international situation since the end of the cold war should have provided new opportunities for resolving the issue of NSA. The nuclear-weapon States concerned should reconsider and readjust their nuclear policy and adopt a more positive, fair and reasonable attitude towards the issue of providing security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. China believes that the great number of non-nuclear-weapon States are completely reasonable and justified in seeking security assurances under which the nuclear-weapon States undertake not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against them. The most effective assurances would be the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. Pending the realization of this ultimate objective, however, the nuclear-weapon States should undertake unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. In addition to the aforementioned commitment, NSA should also include a commitment by nuclear-weapon States not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other. The Chinese delegation supports the early establishment of an NSA ad hoc committee in the CD to negotiate and conclude an international legal instrument.

China has always taken seriously the humanitarian concerns raised by landmines and supports action to impose appropriate, reasonable and feasible restrictions on landmines, anti-personnel landmines in particular. We took an active part in work to amend the Landmines Protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and made our due contributions in this regard. Currently China is making active preparations for early ratification of the new Protocol.

(Mr. Li, China)

Mine clearance constitutes an important part of the solution to the problem of injury caused to innocent civilians by landmines, and as such is a most urgent task facing the international community. China has always attached importance to this issue. Over the years it has made enormous and effective efforts in mine clearance on its territory and in assisting international demining activities. Five years ago a large-scale demining campaign was carried out in certain areas of China, with more than 1 million landmines cleared. A second demining campaign was launched in China last October. China will continue to participate actively in international demining efforts.

Generally speaking, in resolving the landmine issue a balance should be struck between humanitarian concerns and the legitimate requirements of sovereign States for self-defence. Landmines remain an indispensable defensive weapon for many countries. China must reserve its legitimate right to use APLs on its own territory to establish defensive capabilities before alternative means can be found. China understands and respects the sovereign choice of those countries which have signed the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of landmines. However, it is nether realistic nor possible to compel the non-signatories of the Ottawa Convention to accept it here in the CD. On 12 February Finland, on behalf of 23 countries, presented a draft decision on the appointment of a special coordinator on the APL issue. Among these countries there are signatories as well as non-signatories of the Ottawa Convention. If all parties concerned agree to the reappointment of such a special coordinator, the Chinese delegation can go along with this. We hope that a consensus can be reached soon on the relevant mandate.

I would like to reiterate that the Chinese delegation has always attached great importance to the CD, a widely representative multilateral negotiating forum for arms control and disarmament. We have all along participated in the work of the CD in a responsible and constructive manner, and will continue to do so in the future. Whether the CD can accomplish its task and live up to the expectations of the international community depends on the support and joint efforts of its members. It is our sincere hope that the CD will respond to the new trends in the international situation and redouble its efforts to make new contributions to world peace and security.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of China for his statement and the kind words he addressed to me. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor?

Before closing the meeting, let me inform you that immediately afterwards I will hold a very brief informal meeting to pass on to you my thoughts concerning how we should proceed in order to move forward in our work.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held tomorrow, Friday, 13 March at 4 p.m. - I repeat, tomorrow, Friday, 13 March at 4 p.m. It will be preceded by an informal meeting at 3 p.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.